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ABSTRACT

The methods used and the results obtained by means of the accelerated language learning techniques developed by Georgi Lozanov, Director of the Institute of Suggestology in Bulgaria, are discussed. The following topics are included: (1) discussion of hypermnesia, "super memory," and the reasons foreign languages were chosen for purposes of experimentation; (2) anti-suggestive barriers which must be overcome; (3) use of elements which make the method effective, such as authority, infantilization, the "two-plane" character of the suggestive atmosphere, intonation, rhythm, concert-like pseudo-passivity, etc.; (4) description of the physical and mental conditions conducive to accelerated learning; (5) elaboration on the necessary training and personal qualities of the teachers; (6) development and qualities of the language texts; (7) a description of the suggestopedic cycle, i.e., the teaching and learning of the material; and (8) some use of the methods in North America. The conclusion summarizes results obtained to date, such as the learning and use of up to 1,800 words a day, the retention of a very large percentage of the material based on tests administered a year later, profound student enjoyment of this learning process, as well as the remission of some minor neurotic symptoms. (Author/CFM)

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Suggestology as an Effective Language Learning Method

Katherine W. MaCoy

What is the capacity of the normal human brain and what could it absorb if the learning conditions were optimum? For many years scientists have been postulating that we make conscious use of only a small portion of our potential mental capacity.

Beginning approximately in 1955, Dr. Georgi Lozanov, psychotherapist and now director of the Institute of Suggestology in Sofia, Bulgaria, addressed himself to this problem and eventually developed Suggestopedia, a synergistic body of techniques purported by its advocates to be an extremely effective instructional breakthrough.

Suggestopedia is based on the principles of joy, lack of strain, unity of conscious-unconscious functions (which calls for the wholistic participation of the person being taught), and on the fact that suggestive, instructional interrelations activate the reserve capacities of the individual. The means by which these principles are realized are psychological, didactic and artistic. They represent an indivisible unity.[1]

Although Dr. Lozanov believes that the method can be applied to any form of learning which involves rote memory, he has experimented primarily with foreign languages for the following reasons:

1. Memorization and automation are particularly important in foreign language study
2. The feasibility of using foreign words as a measuring unit for experiments in memorization

3. The availability of large numbers of subjects interested in foreign languages in Bulgaria

4. Experimentation in the study of foreign languages has made it possible to transfer specific features of the method to the teaching of other subjects.

According to Dr. Lozanov,"...the capacity of the average, normal and healthy individual in regard to memory, to intellectual activation... is determined by the existing social suggestive norm about the capacities of the human individual. The prestige and authority of society constitute a sufficiently powerful suggestive factor which is capable of changing the norms relative to the capacities of the individual under particular social and historical conditions."[2]

Ancient Hindu yogis were aware that a human is capable of memorizing enormous amounts of material by using certain ritual and psychological techniques. Dr. Lozanov studied the methods used by the Stotrayas, whose duty was to memorize religious Hindu scriptures so that, even if all the ancient works were destroyed and, if only one of these men remained alive, the entire literature could be reproduced verbatum from memory.

This represents a phenomenal feat of hypermnesia or "super-memory" of hundreds of thousands of words. Lozanov believes that the suggestion itself that this was possible played a large part in the development of hypermnesic states.

According to studies, the following elements must be used or dealt with if Suggestology is to create an effective state of hypermnesia:

1. Anti-suggestive barriers must be taken into consideration. The first anti-suggestive barrier is based on conscious, critical thinking, or the critical assessment of any

stimulus. This critical, logical barrier rejects anything which does not appear to be logical. An intuitive-affective anti-suggestive barrier exists which rejects anything that does not create confidence and a sense of security. Also, an ethical barrier rejects any suggestions contrary to the ethical principles of the individual.[3] These antisuggestive barriers are obviously necessary, otherwise the individual would be too accessible to all kinds of suggestions, some of which might be damaging. Suggestology recognizes these barriers and conforms to them.

2. Another element to be taken into consideration is termed authority. Authority in this case, refers to the prestige of the source. The more authoritative the source of information is, the more likely it is to be accepted and the greater significance it will be accorded. The student should, therefore, have confidence in the teacher and the method.

3. This "authority" creates expectation and confidence in positive results, and tends to give rise to what is called infantilization. This condition does not imply regression, but a general, psychic set of confidence, calm and receptivity - that is, plastic characteristics more often in evidence in early periods of life.

The means used to obtain high suggestive effects are of several kinds.

1. One of the most important considerations to take into account is the so-called double-planess or two plane character of the suggestive atmosphere. Unconscious signals are of great value in using the method. They are situations and dynamics often not consciously noticed for their effect, such as the color of the room, the teacher's expression, the extent of physical comfort, etc.

2. Intonational variation, if used as a signal for authority and motivation, will help to capture and maintain attention.

3. The time intervals between the separate fragments to be memorized also affect the volume of memory. Pauses are used to elicit psychological significance, authority and expectation.

4. Infantilization also facilitates pseudo-passivity, a state resembling a child's unstrained perception of the

> environment, or, as Lozanov has stated, a situation similar to that of attending a musical concert. In such a situation, the listeners do not engage in intellectual efforts or conscious memorization, but allow the music to encourage mental relaxation and imagery. This concert-like pseudopassivity avoids its opposite, pseudoactivity, which tends to cause fatigue.
>
> 5. A placebo effect, gained through the ritual of deciphering, the concert sessions, etc., also aids the student's memory retention of the material for a long term.[4]

Fortunately for all of us, the teacher still remains one of the most important factors, and a great deal of care is taken in the selection and training of the instructors. To begin with, it is of great help if the person is outgoing and enthusiastic.

Previously, training periods have varied in length from three to six months. However, according to K. Pashmakova, a teacher trainer at the Institute in Bulgaria, instructors are now trained for a month. Extra training is provided if desired or necessary.

Training includes:

theoretical training and attendance at lectures

learning suggestopedic procedures

studying psychological processes taking place in class

watching other teachers

practice in reading lessons with a background of music

teaching a group under guidance

Some difficulties associated with training are:

insufficient knowledge of methods, psychology or subject

insufficient acquaintence with Suggestology or the failure to put it into practice

interference of other methods

misunderstanding of the requirements of Suggestology, such as the fact that double-planess is an important factor in taping the students' reserves

As far as the talents of the teachers go, the following are recommended:

1. Singing and acting ability are useful, though not absolutely necessary

2. An ability to tap student reserves, particularly of those who feel inferior

3. Knowledge of psychotraumatic causes which might make students lose self-confidence

4. Mastery of two-plane behavior to aid students

5. Familiarity with students and their relationships

6. Avoidance of situations which might cause students to feel awkward or that the teacher is in too superior a position

7. The instructor's maintainence of a balance between closeness and distance in relations with the students

8. Making the students feel easy, protected and self-confident

9. Knowledge of how to correct a mistake. Kindness should not be excessive or the students will lose confidence in the teacher.

10. The teacher should possess enough self-confidence and skill to act natural and avoid artificial behavior

11. A positive, suggestive atmosphere must be created to convince the students that learning is fun, easy and efficient, and that they will retain the material for a long time.

12. A positive atmosphere must be maintained at all times.

13. The teacher must be able to visualize the material being read and project it into the minds of the students, who, as is the teacher, are in the alpha state.

The physical surroundings are also considered to be very important. Every effort is made to avoid sterile, cold classroom surroundings. The classrooms in Bulgaria provide a cheerful, relaxed atmosphere. Each one has twelve specially designed, comfortable chairs arranged in a semi-circle faced by the instructor's chair. A blackboard is provided, as well as two loudspeakers for music and a television screen. There is an open space or stage where theatrical skits take place. Pictures may be hung on the walls, which are painted a pleasing color. The rooms are large enough to contain the chairs and space for acting out the dialogues, but not so large as to cause a feeling of excessive space. The lighting is soft and unobtrusive.

The maximum number of students in a class is twelve, ideally divided between an equal number of men and women. The learners are usually full-time employees or students, who may or may not be given some released time to attend classes.

Each beginning language course lasts thirty days, meeting six days a week, four hours a day, with either a single half-hour intermission or two fifteen minute ones.

Although Lozanov began his experimental training by using standard textbooks, they were soon discarded because they did not contain sufficient new words and grammatical units. New texts were developed by process of trial and elimination.

First, words were abstracted and used in suggestopedic sessions. Then, new words were added which were environmentally associated with

the first ones in order to create stereotyped parts of expressions. Whole expressions or sentences were then abstracted from the texts for fixation in the students' memories. New units were developed by the experimenters with 150 to 300 expressions fixed at one time. Finally, locally produced texts with original dialogues and supplementary material on grammar were developed.[5] These steps led up to the present beginning language texts which incorporate material of specified psychological nature, because the total suggestive effect depends a great deal on content and structure.

The texts are built on the principle of themes. Students memorize lexical-grammatical material developed in ten thematic dialogues each one containing its own story. The subject is also broken down into sub-themes and memorization is based on sentence cues linked to a behavioral beginning, the psychological conditions, and the reactions of the actors in the drama. The material is of an emotional and anecdotal nature which facilitates learning.

For example, in one of the dialogues students are invited into a home for a party, greet each other, describe methods of transportation and what they see upon arrival, the rooms, furniture, decor, colors, objects of interest, etc., and generally immerse themselves in an interesting, enjoyable situation.

The beginning course contains 1,800 to 2,000 lexical units, and each dialogue 180 to 200 new words. Each session also contains some or all of the following: poems, songs, jokes, games, puzzles, proverbs,

role playing, anecdotes, problem solving, competitions, and dancing. These procedures contribute to the animation and enjoyment of the students.

The last session often consists of a play, written, directed and acted by the students in order to give them full expression of the progress they have made. It is a public performance staged for the friends and families of the class members.

Before the students begin the actual course they are tested as to their overall intellectual level, imagination, suggestibility, general linguistic level and knowledge, if any, of the foreign language to be studied. As a result of these tests, they are divided into homogenous groups. Oral and written tests are also given at the beginning and end of the course in order to measure progress.

During the opening session the instructor welcomes the participants individually, explains some of the principles of the method, stresses that there should be no absences or tardiness, and dramatizes the ease of learning. There is no smoking in class and students are asked to keep themselves in optimum physical and mental condition. Each person selects a name, identity and address which would correspond to a native speaker of the target language.

The so-called decoding of new material begins when the instructor reads the dialogue, acting it out and demonstrating its meaning in every possible way. During this time the students do not see the written material. They are instructed to just relax and observe the teacher.

Vertical intonation is used at three levels. An example might be as follows:

Medium tone, "You are going to learn."

Whisper, "It is easy."

Loud, triumphant tone, "You learned!"

Some passages may also be reproduced in chorus. Such a phrase as "A bird flies high" is indicated by gesture, voice, and inflection.

The next part of the session is open to some interpretation. Loaznov says that he does not now use yoga relaxing exercises before the concert session, but merely suggests to the students that they relax. However, in the courses I observed and taught, the students were asked to relax as much as possible in their chairs and breathe several times, inhaling to a count of ten, holding for ten and exhaling to a similiar count of ten. After that they were asked to take a deep breath, tense their bodies, exhale and relax four times.

The instructor gives the name of the music to be played. It is played for a minute before the actual concert and reading starts.

The concert session is divided into an active and a passive part. During the active concert session the teacher paces the reading according to the flow of the music, i.e., dramatic, loud, soft, slow, fast, etc. The students are looking at the text at this point. Their native language is printed on the left hand side of the page, with a translation into the target language on the right hand side.

The students are instructed to relax even more with their eyes

closed and listen to the passive part of the concert session while the instructor reads the dialogue for the third time. The listeners are encouraged to be in an alpha state as they listen to the music and not to pay any particular attention to the dialogue.

The music is of the classical baroque style. Examples of that played during the active part are Hayden's symphony 67 in F major and 69 in B major. For the passive part of the session, Corelli's Concerti Grossi, opus 4, 10, 11, and 12 might be played.

Class members are told that they need to do no home work, but if they like they may read over the dialogues, preferably in the morning upon awakening and in the evening just before going to sleep.

Then follow what are known as elaborations or development of the material. The first elaboration involves problem situations, conversation between couples, thinking problems, skits, competitions, songs, etc.

The second elaboration is conducted on the second day after the initial reading and the material is activated at a higher level. The linguistic phenomena are explained and sub-topics are presented in new combinations usually based on situations differing from the original dialogue. The students act and improvise in various life situations. Each dialogue is worked with for about two days and then a new cycle is started.

This, then, represents a typical series and the eventual learning and use of 1,800 to 2,000 words. In addition to the examination administered at the end of the course, tests given a year later demonstrate

that students retain 80 to 90 percent of the material learned.

Given the length of time the course lasts, this is a very creditable achievement. However, Lozanov has conducted experiments during which students learned at least that many words per day. The most unusual results that I am aware of are those obtained by Professor Velvovsky of the Psychological Institute of Kharkov, Russia, who taught 2,000 French words and expressions a day for 26 days.[6]

A four-hour session each day would normally exhaust both teacher and students. However, I can say from personal experience that instructor and students usually feel as well or better at the end of the sessions than at the beginning. In addition, there are frequent remissions of some symptoms such as a tendency to headaches, and minor neurosis; also, student sleep patterns often improve. The sessions are a great pleasure to direct and attend.

Dr. Lozanov has "succeeded in creating a method for mobilizing the unconscious automatic charging of the memory, of working out methods for the realization of the phenomena 'emerging' in one's memory into kinetic acts, into speech, mimic, or other types of behavior"[7] at an extremely effective level.

Implementation of these methods is just beginning to gain ground in this hemisphere. Dr. Donald Schuster, Professor of Psychology, Iowa State University, has been doing a good deal of experimentation in this field and Gabriel Racle of the Public Service Commission, Staff Development Branch, located in Ottawa, Canada, is using the system in order to foment bilingualism among civil servants in Canada.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Georgi Lozanov, "The Nature and History of the Suggestopaedic System of Teaching Foreign Languages and its Experimental Prospect," Suggestology and Suggestopaedia, 1975, p. 8.

[2]Georgi Lozanov, "Foundations of Suggestology," Symposium on the Problems of Suggestology, Sofia, Bulgaria, 1971, p. 73.

[3]Ibid, p. 81.

[4]Ibid, pp. 82-84.

[5]Georgi Lozanov, "The Nature and History of the Suggestopaedic System of Teaching Foreign Languages and its Experimental Prospect," Suggestology and Suggestopaedia, 1975, p. 12.

[6]Zbigniew William Wolkowski, "Suggestology: A Major Contribution by Bulgarian Scientists." MRU Monograph #10, October, 1974, p. 4.

[7]J. Z. Velvovskiy, "The Ideas and Method of G. Lozanov in the Eyes of the Psychotherapeutist-Psychohygienist," Suggestology and Suggestopaedia, 1975, p. 19